

A victory for diplomacy

"Look, it's perfectly simple."

René narrowed his eyes at his fellow civil servant. "When you say things like that it makes me think that they're not simple at all."

Jalida waved her hands as if to brush away his suspicions.

"You're overthinking things. Look, there's the official delegation. That's the aggressive guy and his bodyguard, and they're coming on Saturday morning. They might be here to yell at us, they might be here to try to extort us, they might not be here to do either. You know, the usual."

"You have a very particular view of international diplomacy."

"I do when it comes to the Iron Confederacy." The two shared a moment of mutual sympathy at the endless power and status games of the Suranni before Jalida continued. "Anyway, they're coming first. Then early on Saturday afternoon there's the unofficial delegation."

"Right, them. The unofficial delegation who have been officially announced."

"Of course they've been officially announced. We need to know that they're officially unofficial, or we might think that they were official. But they still want to talk to our officials."

René rubbed his temples as he felt the headache that he'd been avoiding all morning trying to come back. "Of course they do. Why wouldn't they?"

"Why indeed? And then there's the unofficially unofficial visitors later on Saturday afternoon who are not here to talk to anyone official as far as we know, although they might be."

"Right. And none of these groups are travelling together?"

"Not as far as we know."

"Despite all coming from the same place and going to the same place?"

"Got it in one."

There was a long pause before René spoke again. "Why are they like this?"

Jalida shrugged. "I don't know. I think this is just how they have fun."

Overview

- The Iron Confederacy is a large powerful nation that considers itself the equal of the Empire
- Relations with the Confederacy remain civil but strained due to religious and cultural differences

The Iron Confederacy sees itself as a powerful nation, a potential rival to the Empire in size and strength. Such claims are difficult to prove or disprove; the Empire knows very little about its south-western neighbour. While there have been occasional clashes over the years, neither nation has successfully claimed target from the other. No nation appreciates being threatened or intimidated, but the Dukes of the Iron Confederacy react especially badly to perceived slights, and thanks to their peculiar beliefs it is all too easy to offend them – they despise both the Imperial Conclave and the Imperial Synod for example. They seem to respect the Military Council and the Throne at least, but it is a narrow bridge to build a shared understanding on.

The Suranni ambassador to the Empire is Baroness Katerine Lavasse of Meore, who operates from the Tour Lavasse in Chaubrette, a territory unknown to Imperial citizens that apparently lies to the west of Veroigne. A noble naga, she

replaced the significantly more dogmatic Jeanne de Hibernat, a High Priestess of the Suranni god Evra the Smith, Maiden of the Forge. She has already indicated that she is very much more pragmatic than her predecessor and more interested in compromise. She still reports to the Dukes of the Iron Confederacy, however, and so her apparent goodwill toward the Empire cannot be relied upon.

The Iron Confederacy

- Status: Foreigner
- Ports: Robec
- Ambassador: Tethros i Zuhri i Erigo of the Brass Coast

Treaties and Negotiations

- At present the Iron Confederacy have made no moves to embrace the Freedom Accords
- Civil servants expect the Confederacy to attempt to play the Liberty Pact and the Freedom Accord off against each other

One area of conflict with the Iron Confederacy is in their treatment of their serfs. Imperial efforts to persuade the Suranni to give up slavery have met with limited success. Eventually the Iron Dukes agreed to change the status of all their slaves to put them on the same level as their serfs. They freely acknowledge that the difference is minor, but serfs do enjoy some limited protections that slaves did not. They cannot be harmed out of hand, for example, and cannot be bought and sold as chattel. They still cannot leave the land they are bound to where they live and work, but the landowner does have some responsibility to ensure that they are not unnecessarily abused.

This may be one reason that the so-called Freedom Accord – the

alliance sponsored by the Asaveans and Jarmish – has apparently made overtures to the Suranni. Last season the Suranni laid out a clear challenge to the Empire to demonstrate the benefits of not accepting the offers of the Freedom Accord, or they would almost certainly choose to join that hostile alliance.

Perhaps in response to these carefully couched demands, Ambassador Tehtros submitted a treaty to the Senate, which they then ratified. Not only did it grant Free Trade status to the Iron Confederacy, but it criminalized the “sale or export of any and all narcotics to the Iron Confederacy.” These provisions are intended to last for three years, although repealing them at that time would still require action by the Senate. There's also a little uncertainty as to what “narcotics” means – but the Magistrates are confident that they can provide guidance to that effect. For the moment, it is perhaps best to assume that the ban applies to anything someone could consume that changes their behaviour – making the sale of all potions illegal. Liao, of course, is already illegal to sell to the Iron Confederacy via ports or the Suranni-Imperial border.

Baroness Katerina had included a couple of other “suggestions” for things that might convince the Suranni to eschew the Freedom Accord – making it illegal to preach the Imperial Way in the Iron Confederacy, or acknowledging the Suranni people as the equals of the Casinean Empire. She recounts her disappointment that the Empire and the Throne were not able to bring themselves to show their respect in this way, and has tried to explain to the Dukes as to why this might be the case.

She does note, wryly, that the Ambassador's concerns that working with the Asaveans or the Grendel (also believed to be part of the Freedom Accord) would bring “trouble”, while working with the Empire will not, is the sort of statement only someone who has never tried to work with the Empire might make. Nonetheless, they have not made any move to embrace

Asavean and Jarm at this time.

Suranni Trade

- Iron Confederacy merchants are not being impacted by the Asavean bounty
- Imperial fleets visiting Robec receive a unique consumable in place of the usual luxury goods
- The Suranni still have sanctions in place against Imperial trade, meaning fleets visiting Robec have a -1 penalty to effective rank

Suranni trade is not being impacted by the Asavean bounty. Most Iron Confederacy merchants prefer to travel overland, passing through the Brass Coast to reach Imperial markets. Or, more often, simply selling their goods in Segura (or Feroz before it was lost - the town of Bramar in particular was a popular destination for Suranni). The decision to allow Iron Confederacy traders to avoid tariffs on their imports is especially welcome.

Duke Helen Gerradin, the ruler of Veroigne, is more interested in the other new law passed by the Senate - or perhaps some of her advisors are. The port of Robec is in Veroigne, and a significant amount of Imperial trade passes through its docks. Making it illegal for merchants to bring "the filth of Dumon" to her quayside is a welcome move. Robec is also the site of one of the largest temples of Evra the Smith, the Suranni god of artisans, crafters, and merchants. In the past, the priests of the Maiden of the Forge have been unsupportive toward trade with the Empire, but the acceptance of this new law may have won at least some of them round.

As a consequence, the Duke has removed a prohibition against trading Kobol's Vigour to Imperial merchants. This metallic elixir apparently bolsters the imbibers' battlefield prowess, and

provides a measure of protection from the insidious effects of Dumon's servants. From the description, the Civil Service believe it is a tonic that can help remove the effects of weakness, in a way that sounds a little like the effect an Abraxus Stone has on venom. Exactly what it does, however, is not clear - unsurprising given it has been illegal for Suranni merchants to trade it to Imperial traders since Robec opened.

Any fleet that trades with Robec in the coming season will now receive two bottles of Kobol's Vigour in place of the 30 rings of luxuries a standard fleet would receive. Duke Gerradin has announced that "Evra will judge whether Imperial merchants truly value the gifts of the Suranni" - the civil service suggest that they will be evaluating how many Imperial fleets visit Robec in the coming seasons and that will determine whether the port continues to offer the peculiar Suranni preparation. There is also some speculation as to what other unique preparations the Suranni might be able to brew - given they eschew magic in all its forms, and even with the supposed miracles of their priests, it is likely they have fallen back on drugs and potions to make up for the lack of ritual enchantments and incantations.

It's notable, incidentally, that the one thing the Iron Dukes have not done so far is relax their own sanctions against Imperial trade. While fleets can visit Robec, they still suffer a -1 penalty to their effective production.

Children of Wrecks

- The Iron Confederacy declines an offer of an alliance against the Children of Wrecks at this time

While the Children of Wrecks have been primarily causing trouble for the Empire and the Grendel, there were reports of an attack on Axiom Prison in the Iron Confederacy. Some of the worst Suranni criminals were imprisoned there, along with a few

innocent magicians... and apparently several of the cult leaders of the Hand of Dumon. Many of them have apparently joined up with the rogue pirate nation of High Priestess Shivaarn.

The Ambassador has raised this matter with Baroness Katerine and proposed a joint effort against the Children of Wrecks before they become an even bigger threat. Unfortunately, the Dukes are not minded to embrace any military alliance with the Empire at this time. Baroness Katerine does not come out and say it, but suggests that having been rebuffed when they offered to invade Feroz has disinclined the Iron Confederacy to “come running” when the Empire decides they want their help.

For the moment, the Suranni will protect their own territorial waters and let the Grendel and the Empire deal with the threat of the rogue sorcerers. Should they attempt to attack the coast of the Iron Confederacy they will find the Suranni navies ready and willing to put an end to their depredations.

Baroness Katarine is interested in one element of the Ambassador's offer however. They propose that the Children of Wrecks were “brought to these lands by the Asaveans and their Grendel pawns.” Do they have any evidence that this is the case?

Hand of Dumon

- The Suranni believe the Empire should start fighting Dumon by disbanding their Conclave and Synod

On the subject of the Hand of Dumon, the Baroness is suitably concerned to hear that the Ambassador has apparently been declared an enemy of the Wicked One, and does indeed agree that it is important for the Empire to oppose his ambitions and those of his servants. However, she rather primly points out, as far as the Iron Confederacy is concerned the best way the Empire could do this would be to stop letting his servants – the

magicians and wizards who draw on his power to work their corrupt magic – run riot. Shut down the Imperial Conclave, imprison the ringleaders, and punish any magician who dares invoke the wicked wellspring of Dumon. At the same time, they should turn away from the temptations and lies of Dumon as manifest in the wicked drug-fuelled magic of the Imperial Synod, and stop enshrining the leavings of the God of Lies as if they offer spiritual benefits. The Confederacy stands ready to help the Empire should they actually wish to oppose Dumon, finally. All they have to do is ask.

The civil service suggest that Baroness Katerine is not being entirely serious; she is pragmatic enough to realise that the Conclave and the Synod are woven into the fabric of Imperial society. At the same time, though, she is simply presenting the attitudes of her peers. The Iron Confederacy believes the Empire is irredeemably corrupt, a playground for Dumon's followers, and fundamentally separated from the power of the true gods.

Return Of The Wolfhound

- Ser Marquette Lavasse and his bodyguard Ser Guillaume are travelling to the Empire to meet with the Ambassador to the Iron Confederacy.
- They also wish to meet with either the Emperor or a representative of her household, and have suggested that the Ambassador to Faraden may also wish to attend.
- They will arrive at the Imperial Offices at or around 10:30 on the Saturday of the upcoming summit.

Last Winter the Iron Confederacy sent a diplomatic delegation to attend the coronation of Empress Vesna. Sadly the position of Ambassador to the Iron Confederacy was vacant at the time, meaning that the Suranni representatives arrived without anyone

expecting them. Despite this, the delegation was met, was able to speak with the Emperor, and later presented them with a priceless (replica) heirloom.

Last summit the Senate passed a treaty with the Iron Confederacy, offering them Free Trade status and criminalising the export of narcotics to the Iron Confederacy for three years. The Suranni have accepted this treaty, although reactions at the Embassy have apparently been somewhat guarded. Whatever the case, it seems that the Treaty has had its intended impact. No arrangement has been reached between the Suranni and the Freedom Accord. The staff at the Embassy do not seem to regard the matter as entirely closed, however. As such, a diplomatic delegation is making its way to Anvil to discuss the matter in more detail.

After his previous visit the Civil Service have done some digging into Ser Marquette Lavasse. He is one of Baroness Katarine's relatives, a group who apparently make up the lion's share of the Ambassador's inner circle. He is also, so the rumour goes, known as 'the Wolfhound'. Partly this is due to his skill as a hunter, partly due to the fact that he is notorious for being the Baroness' attack dog. If Baroness Katarine wishes to test someone she sends Ser Marquette to shout, complain, make unreasonable demands, and generally make an intimidating nuisance of himself, then sees how people react to him. The assorted diplomats at the Embassy speak on this fairly casually with no indication that the Empire might be offended by such treatment. It is, after all, just part of the Great Game.

Whether Ser Marquette is being sent in this capacity or for a more cordial discussion remains to be seen. Word has been sent ahead that he and his bodyguard Ser Guillaume the Grim will be arriving at Anvil at or around 10:30 on the Saturday of the forthcoming summit. They expect to be met at the Imperial Offices, as befits their station, in order to discuss how the current

positive relations between the Casinean Empire and the Iron Confederacy can be cemented. They obviously wish to speak with Tethros i Zuhri i Erigo, the current Ambassador, but have also suggested that the Ambassador to Faraden may benefit from attending, though they have not said why. A request has been made that either the Emperor herself or a representative of her household who can speak on their behalf be present. It is not stated outright, but the implication is that the Suranni have far more respect for the Face of the Empire than any mere elected officials.

Visiting Priests

- Two Suranni priests are travelling to the Empire to meet with the ambassador to the Iron Confederacy, and fleet owners Sianu and Caesar.
- They will arrive at the Hub at 1330 on Saturday where they expect the ambassador to meet and escort them to a private location.

Separate to the official delegation, word comes only a little before the start of the autumn equinox summit that an additional group of Suranni wish to meet with Tethros i Zuhri i Erigo, ambassador to the Iron Confederacy. They have also invited Navarri Sianu and Urizeni Caesar to attend.

The Temple of the Veiled King have sent two priests to discuss an "urgent matter". No further elaboration has been given, but a Suranni temple choosing to contact the Imperial civil service is beyond a rarity, so it is perhaps unsurprising that their missive was so brief.

Marin and Estenne - with no other names given - apparently aim to arrive at the Hub at 1330 on the Saturday of the autumn equinox. They expect the the ambassador to the Iron

Confederacy to meet them there, and escort them to a more appropriate location for a private conversation.

Baron de Bestel

- Emissaries of Baron de Bestel are visiting Anvil in response to a private invitation.
- They will arrive at the Hub at 1700 on Saturday, where they will pay their regards to the Ambassador before meeting their host.

Two more Suranni are making their way to Anvil for the equinox. Baron de Bestel has sent two of her family, believed to be one of her children and one of her siblings, to take up an invitation given by a "Casinean noble". They are unwilling to be drawn on the specifics of their visit, and seem to be intending to give the Ambassador only the greetings required by formality before going about their business. Presumably whoever sent the invitation is expecting them, and will find a quiet place to rest and talk about... whatever they are here to discuss.